**“What is the truth?” Unit Learning Goals and Standards**

**State Standards Achieved in this Unit:**

Standard 1: Reading Process

Goal 1.1: Acquire Concepts about a text

8.LA.1.1.1 Analyze the organizational structure of printed material and electronic sources of access information

Goal 1.6: Vocabulary and Concept Development

8.LA.1.6.2 Explain relationships among words including connotation/denotation, antonyms, synonyms, and words with multiple meanings

8.LA.1.6.3 Define words and concepts necessary for comprehending Grade 8 content area texts

8.LA.1.6.4 Clarify pronunciations, meaning, alternate word choices, parts of speech, and etymology of words using dictionary, thesaurus, glossary, and technology resources

Standard 2: Comprehension and Interpretation

Goal 2.1: Acquire Strategies and Skills for Comprehending Text

8.LA.2.1.1 Determine the relationships among facts, ideas, and events used in various texts to support a central purpose

8.LA.2.1.2 Distinguish cause and effect relationships to gain meaning

8.LA.2.1.3 Make inferences, draw conclusions, and form opinions based on information gathered from text; cite evidence to support

Goal 2.3 Acquire Skills to Comprehend Literary Text

8.LA.2.3.1 Read and respond to literature from a variety of genres

8.LA.2.3.4 Evaluate the structural elements of the plot and how conflicts are addressed and resolved

8.LA.2.3.5 Explain the author’s point of view and interpret how it influences the story

8.LA.2.3.6 Analyze themes across various genres

Standard 4: Writing Applications

Goal 4.3: Acquire Persuasive Writing Skills

8.LA.4.3.1 Write persuasive compositions that state a position and support it with evidence and emotional appeals

Standard 5: Writing Components

Goal 5.1: Acquire Handwriting Skills

8.LA.5.1.1 Write fluently and legibly in print or cursive

Standard 6: Communication

Goal 6.1: Acquire Listening Skills

8.LA.6.1.1 Listen to acquire and summarize information from a variety of electronic or live sources (listen and respond to oral messages, readings, student presentations, lectures, and electronic presentations)

Goal 6.2: Acquire Speaking Skills

8.LA.6.2.2 Deliver oral summaries of articles that include the main ideas and the most significant details; state ideas in own words, except for when quoted directly from sources

8.LA.6.2.4 Deliver persuasive presentations that include a well-defined position; differentiate fact from opinion; and support arguments with detailed evidence, examples, reasoning, and persuasive language

Reading strategies expected to be “incorporated into regular instruction in addition to the skills listed under the “Critical Skills” for each unit:

Before Reading Strategies

* Identify the type of text to be read, and match strategies and graphic organizers to the text to support the purpose for reading
* Predict, question, and visualize what will be learned
* Activate prior knowledge: Brainstorm related topics, become familiar with necessary background, learn about the author, recall related personal experiences, use KWL-Plus, and use PQ4R
* Select strategies and graphic organizers to understand and remember various types of texts: Outline, webbing/mind mapping, flow chart, timeline, and note-taking
* Determine purpose for reading
* Identify and define unfamiliar essential vocabulary

During Reading Strategies

* Students use self-monitoring to determine when they do or do not understand and use fix-up strategies when they don’t understand: re-reading, visualizing, using text pictures and charts, adjusting rate, defining unknown words, questioning, predicting, and Directed Reading Thinking Activity
* Connect new information to the known
* Make and revise predictions about what is being read
* Use features of texts to find and interpret information
* Look for information to fulfill purpose for reading
* As questions about the text and look for answers
* Use text to verify meaning(s) of essential vocabulary
* Use essential vocabulary to aid comprehension
* Locate and identify main and supporting ideas
* Skim and scan to locate details in complex test
* Locate, understand, paraphrase, and synthesize small but significant details in complex text
* Use outlining or note-taking to organize information

After Reading Strategies

* Determine if the purpose for reading has been achieved
* Determine which questions have been answered and which still remain for re-reading or further reading
* Reflect and express what new knowledge has been added to prior knowledge
* Determine the correctness of predictions
* Summarize what has been learned
* Paraphrase important details from the text
* Use a variety of graphic organizers to analyze and synthesize ideas related to the reading: diagrams, maps, charts, webs, outlines, and notes
* Compare and contrast texts with other texts
* React and support reaction to the text (make judgments about information, validity of ideas, or quality of work based on a set of criteria for expository or literary text)
* Evaluate new information and hypothesis by testing against known information and ideas
* Evaluate information for currency, accuracy, and validity
* Transfer knowledge of essential vocabulary to other reading and writing tasks

**Meridian School District Curricular ideas suggested in District Unit Planner which are fulfilled by this unit:**

Unit topic: Mysterious Circumstances

Conceptual lens: Investigation

Topic ideas: folklore, natural phenomenon, mystery as literature, personal origins (a little bit), logic and reasoning (a little)

Enduring Understandings:

* Investigation requires the gathering of information
* Mysteries exist when information is unavailable or incomplete
* Lack of documentation results in historical mysteries (or, sometimes, in folk tales)
* Logical thinking uses reason to arrive at a valid conclusion
* Mystery is a popular genre encompassing specific literary elements
* The mysteries of nature are investigated through scientific inquiry (briefly)
* Humans created folk tales, legends, and myths in order to explain unexplainable events

**April Harrison**

**Eighth Grade English**

**Lesson Plan for Week 1, Day 1**

**Unit’s Essential Questions and Sub-Question(s) for Today’s Lesson if Applicable**

* What is “the truth?”
* How do people make sense of what they don’t understand?
* How do you know what the truth looks like?

**Classroom Arrangement**

Rows of desks (unfortunately) facing the front of the room. We could move to the other side of the portable, but for some classes there will not be enough seats for everyone to sit in there.

**Learning Outcomes:**

* By the end of the class session, my students will know the plan and essential question for our upcoming unit.
* By the end of the class session, my students will have the ability to connect the essential question to their own lives and share this connection to other students via a journal entry and discussion.

**Materials Needed**

* Student journals

**Activities and Instruction**

* Bell work: Have students get out their journals and date a new entry.
* Give students the first 5-10 minutes to answer this journal prompt: “What is “the truth” to you? How do you know what is real and what isn’t? Give an example from your own life of a time when you thought something was real, but then found out it wasn’t (or vise versa).” Check in with students at 5 minute mark to see how much more time they really need. After this, give students about 5 minutes to share their responses with a nearby partner.
* Then I will introduce our upcoming unit, where we will read folk tales and mysteries to explore this idea of “truth.” I will explain that they will do several assignments along with the reading and will also do a culminating project in order to work through ideas about truth and to explore the essential question “What is the truth?” and also the question “How to people make sense of what they don’t understand?” I will explain that these are two large essential questions that we will be coming back to throughout the unit – and their answers to these questions will hopefully grow and change as we read more and learn more. Then I will address any questions or concerns.
* Next, I will have students number off in groups of 4 (designate one person as the recorder to take down group ideas) to answer one of several questions together: How do you know something is truthful? What steps do you take to figure out what the truth is? Why would different people have two different versions of the same event? (For Challenge, add more questions, since they exhaust their topics pretty quickly.) The paper on which they do their responses will not be handed in. They will have about 10-15 minutes to do this.
  + I will number the groups (1s, 2s, 3s, etc.). Groups 1 and 2 will answer the 1st question, 3 and 4 will answer the 2nd question, groups 5 and 6 will answer the third question.
* I will then bring the groups together. Groups 1 and 3 will discuss, 2 and 5, 4 and 6 (that way they will each get to share their different perspectives).
* If there is time or if the small group sharing gets exhausted, then I will bring the class together as a whole group and ask what the biggest ideas are that each group (1, 2, 3) and combined group (1 and 3, 2 and 5, etc.) came up with. Then I can throw out questions like “How does religion affect your perception of truth?” “What does culture have to do with truth?” “Does it matter if you are a kid or an adult?”

**Assessment**

Informal assessment. I must keep going around the room to assess when conversation has been exhausted and to keep us on track as far as time, and to see how students are reacting to the ideas here.

**(Homework**)

No homework for this lesson.

**Notes Page**

No notes.

**Mysterious Circumstances Unit Overview!**

Appendix A

Essential Question: What is “the truth?”

Sub-question: How do people make sense of what they don’t understand?

For this unit, we will be reading folk tales AND mysteries, and wrestle with the question, What is “the truth?” Everyone has a different answer to this question, and different people think about this idea in different ways. We will try to explore as many of these ideas as we can while we read folk tales about potatoes, Brer Possum, and about how some Native Americans believe the animals were named. We will also delve into mystery, reading a Sherlock Holmes story. And then, at the end, we will read a spooky story – and you will have to decide whether you think it is a folk tale or a mystery as your final project.

You will be doing many small assignments for this unit, but they will be assigned over the course of the next 6 weeks, so you will have plenty of time to complete them. Some will be turned in over the course of the semester – others you will keep and turn in at the end of the unit with your final project.

*Here is what we will be reading:*

“Idaho Potatoes” retold by S.E. Schlosser, “Adventures of the Speckled Band” by Arthur Conan Doyle, “A Horseman in the Sky” by Ambrose Bierce, “Crime Solving Procedures for the Modern Detective” by the California Commission, “Why the Waves Have Whitecaps” by Zora Neale Hurston, and “Brer Possum’s Dilemma” by Jackie Torrence.

*We will be doing these formal assignments along with your final project (and some fun informal ones that I haven’t listed here):*

* What Do Folk Tales DO? worksheet
* “Speckled Band” Vocabulary Squares
* “Speckled Band” Character Log/Story Map
* What Do Mysteries DO? Worksheet
* “Horseman” Vocabulary Squares
* “Horseman” Character Log/Story Map
* Journals (for a participation grade based on our in-class writing prompts)

Hang on to them – you may need to reference them to complete your final project. **THEY WILL ALL BE GRADED** – but I will grade them on an “as you go” basis where I check for progress throughout the unit. Definitely keep them in the same place so you don’t lose them. *If you are afraid you will lose them, you can keep them in your writing folders in the classroom.*

**“What is the Truth?” Opinionnaire**

Appendix B

**Purpose**: For this unit, we will be exploring the questions “What is the Truth?” and “How do humans make sense of the unknown?” To explore these questions, we first need to look into our own experiences to see where we stand in regards to truth, stories, and understanding the unknown.

**Directions**: Read each of the statements below. In the space to the left, *write whether you Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD) or Strongly Disagree (SD).* When you are finished, choose the statement you find most interesting or noteworthy and explain your thinking in the explanation space below.

\_\_\_\_ 1. All truths are easy to understand once they are discovered; the point is to discover them.

\_\_\_\_2. The unknown always seems sublime.

\_\_\_\_3. Religions die when they are proved to be true. Science is the record of dead religions.

\_\_\_\_4. What you perceive, your observations, feelings, interpretations, are all your truth. Your truth is important. But it is not The Truth.

\_\_\_\_5. Whoever is careless with the truth in small matters cannot be trusted with important matters.

\_\_\_\_6. The belief that there is only one truth, and that oneself is in possession of it, is the root of all evil in the world.

\_\_\_\_7. A thing is not necessarily true because a man dies for it.

\_\_\_\_8. Truth, in matters of religion, is simply opinion that has survived.

\_\_\_\_9. When the fabric of the universe becomes unknown, it is the duty of the university to produce weavers.

\_\_\_\_10. The first reaction to truth is hatred.

\_\_\_\_11. Explaining the unknown by means of the unobservable is always a perilous business.

\_\_\_\_12. It’s no wonder that truth is stranger than fiction. Fiction has to make sense.

**Explanation**:

**April Harrison**

**Eighth Grade English**

**Lesson Plan for Week 1, Day 3 (Modeled after Rachel Bear’s frontloading activity about progress)**

**Unit’s Essential Questions and Sub-Question(s) for Today’s Lesson if Applicable**

Main question: What is the truth?

Sub-questions: How do people make sense of what they don’t understand?

**Classroom Arrangement**

Class will need to be in groups of 4, so the desks can be moved accordingly. Or, students can move to the other room (my mentor has a portable, where one room has tables and chairs and the other has desks) and sit at the tables as groups.

**Learning Outcomes:**

* By the end of the class session, my students will create connections between some examples of religious figures, ideas from folklore, and controversial current events and relate them to our Essential Question, “What is ‘the truth’?”
* Students will also begin to think about the many facets of the meaning of the word “truth.”

**Materials Needed**

* 6 copies (one for each group) of my “Mysterious Pictures” packet (each page has a numbered picture of a Mysterious Picture on it (there are 10 pictures).
* White board and markers

**Activities and Instruction**

* For bell work, I will have students respond to this prompt: “So far, what is your definition of the word, TRUTH?”
* After maybe 5 minutes, I will tell students that we will be thinking about this main question a lot today. Then I will have them get into groups of four based on the color of their shirts. Then I will ask them to get a pen and piece of paper (or their journals) and sit next to each other – and that we all need to be in the same room for this, so feel free to move the desks around a bit in order to get closer so that you can all look off of one piece of paper. Tell students they can sit on the floor if they wish.
* Then I will hand out the “Mysterious Pictures” packet, which I will tell students they are not allowed to open until I say. I will tell them that we will be looking through the pictures in this packet slowly and one at a time, trying to ask themselves these questions: “What is the subject of this picture? How does it relate to our essential questions “What is truth?” and “How do people make sense of what they don’t understand?” I will write our essential questions on the board, and then write the other two questions underneath (What is the subject of this picture? How does it relate to our essential questions?). I’ll tell them that I will give them exact instructions for how to look at these pictures, so to wait and do as I say.
* Next, I will carefully walk students through looking at each picture.
  + “Silently, I need everyone to look at picture number 1. Think about the questions on the board, and try to answer “What is the subject?” and maybe “How does this relate to our essential questions?” Jot down some notes on your paper. You have two minutes to do this.”
  + Continue in the same thread, and give students 1 minute or 2 minutes, depending on whether they seem engaged or whether they seem like crabby patties about it. Transition by saying “finish your thoughts…now turn to picture number 3. You have 2 minutes.”
* At the end of the sequence of pictures, I will tell them that we will go back through the pictures, telling them exactly what each picture is and giving them a little more time to reflect. I will tell them to write down on their paper (not on the packet!) what each picture is so that they know for discussion, but that right now, they still need to be silent. They will get to discuss with their group members in a few minutes.
  + “Go back to picture number one please. This picture is of sasquatch, better known as bigfoot.” I will pause for maybe 10 or 20 seconds, depending on how scrunched up their faces seem and how many people are jotting ideas down. “Now move to picture number 2. This picture is of Vishnu, the Hindu main god.” Continue through the pictures.
* Then, I will give students permission to talk. I will give them 10 or 15 minutes to discuss what those pictures are, and how they relate to our essential questions.
* After this time, we will come together as a class and I will get my Board Writing on. I will ask them about the key, main ideas they saw in these pictures and write them on the board. Then I will ask them how they think this relates to our essential questions.

**Assessment**

* I will just go around among the groups and see how the students are processing these ideas.

**(Homework)**

* No homework

**Notes**

* I’m sorry – I don’t have a “mysterious pictures packet” in the appendices. I wanted to do a slideshow, but then had to put it into a packet form because the room doesn’t have a computer projector set up, but then I thought perhaps I should make it into transparencies to ultimately save paper, etc. etc. It has become a huge mess and I’m not sure what medium I am going to do. Plus, the “packet” that I came up with is 10 pages long and is 4GB for some reason (something about the pictures I copied and pasted having secret data along with them? I don’t know if that’s true but the lab tech suggested something like that). So I just left it OUT!

**What Do Folk Tales *Do*? Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

Appendix C for week 1, day 4 lesson

Directions: As we read these folk tales in class, explore their characteristics, and learn about their components, fill in this table. You will work on this collaboratively in class, and outside of class if you need extra time. **DO NOT LOSE THIS SHEET** - it will be collected for a grade with your final project at the end of the unit.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | “Idaho Potatoes” | “Why the Waves Have Whitecaps” | “Brer Possum’s Dilemma” |
| Main Characters:  (Who is involved?) |  |  |  |
| Basic Events:  (Very simple plot line) |  |  |  |
| Function of Tale: (Explain? Teach lesson? Entertain? Other?) |  |  |  |
| What circumstances could have caused someone to write this folk tale? Why do you think so? |  |  |  |
| How does this folk tale answer the question, “What is the truth?” |  |  |  |

**April Harrison**

**Eighth Grade English**

**Lesson Plan for Week 2 Day 2**

**Unit’s Essential Questions and Sub-Question(s) for Today’s Lesson if Applicable**

* What is “the truth?”
* What do folk tales do? What function do they serve for human culture?
* What IS a folk tale?

**Classroom Arrangement**

Desks in rows, facing front. But students can move to the other side of the portable to work on their posters, since that room has large tables and moveable chairs.

**Learning Outcomes:**

* By the end of the class session, my students will reflect on the three folk tales they have read and use their connections they make between them to create a definition for what is a folk tale (this will include characteristics and functions of folk tales).

**Materials Needed**

Markers and poster-sized sheets of paper (butcher paper, maybe?).

**Activities and Instruction**

* I will have students begin with this journal prompt: “What IS a folk tale? What does it do? Reflect on the three tales we’ve read (“Idaho Potatoes,” “Why the Waves have Whitecaps,” and “Brer Possum’s Dilemma”) and tell me what purpose you think folk tales serve in human culture.” I will give students 5-10 minutes to do this (lean towards 5 – there is a lot to do today). While students write, I will make a chart on the board (three columns, 1 for each folk tale, and two rows, one for “characteristics” and one for “functions”).
* I will ask if anyone wants to share their thoughts. Then we will move onto the chart. As a class, students will fill out the chart (which is basically a simplified version of their “What do Folk Tales Do?” worksheet). I will tell them to get out their worksheets to either reference or fill in as we talk. We will go around the room, getting responses as to what each folk tale’s characteristics are, and what each folk tale’s functions are. I will be careful to not portray that there are any single “right” answers, just good answers based on evidence. Take 10-15 minutes for this.
* I will then put students into groups (maybe they will number off, or I will use Group Cards or something to make group selection quick and easy), and tell them to come up with a definition for what a folk tale is. I will explain that this definition needs to include the characteristics of a folk tale, along with the functions of a folk tale. Then they will create a visual representation of their definition. I will explain that they will have 20 minutes to do this – so they should probably spend 10 minutes creating their definition, and then 10 minutes putting it on the poster paper in whatever way they like (pictures, bulleted list, etc.). I will do many time reminders to try to keep them on task, and emphasize (for the overachievers and artsy-fartsies) that I don’t expect a masterpiece – just a quick visualization of their ideas.
* If there is time, I will have each group briefly share their definitions. If there isn’t time, perhaps I will keep them to share at the beginning of the next day.

**Assessment**

* I will be assessing student ideas while we fill in the chart as a class, informally determining whether they understood the texts, thought about the texts, and tried to draw some conclusions from them.
* I will also look at their final poster to see whether they are connecting the three folk tales and making generalizations based on the data they found to come up with representations of their folk tale definition.

**(Homework**)

For homework, I will tell students that they should use the ideas they came up with today to finish filling out their “What do Folk Tales Do?” worksheet (if it is still missing information).

**Notes Page**

Tomorrow, we will be doing further activities to connect folk tales to the essential question, What is “the truth?” Intersperse references to this question throughout the lesson and as I walk around while students are wrangling ideas in their groups. I want them to continue to connect to this question.

**April Harrison**

**8th Grade English**

**Lesson Plan for Day Week 2 Day 3**

**Unit’s Essential Questions and Sub-Question(s) for Today’s Lesson if Applicable**

* What is “the truth?”
* What is the definition of a folk tale?
* How can a series of mysterious events become a folk tale?

**Classroom Arrangement**

Desks are in rows, facing the front of the room. But students can move to the other half of the portable to sit at the large tables with moveable chairs there.

**Learning Outcomes:**

* Students will re-visit their definitions of folk tales from yesterday.
* Students will, in groups of 3 or 4, create a short folk tale based on a short series of mysterious events. This folk tale will align with their folk tale definitions from yesterday.

**Materials Needed**

* Mysterious Events Sheets (simple sets of weird events to hand out to students as the basis for their folk tales)
* Frayer Model Diagram
* Folk Tale Worksheets
* (Possibly, to save paper, I could put the Mysterious events or the directions for the assignment on the board or on an overhead.)

**Activities and Instruction**

* I want to get students back into the mindset of thinking about how folk tales are related to truth, and to think about their folk tale definitions from yesterday – but I only want to do this for a few minutes to give them time to work on the activity. To achieve this, I will give students a Frayer Model Diagram for the term “folk tale.” Thinking back to yesterday, they will fill out this template (definition, characteristics, examples, and non-examples) for about 5 minutes, share with a closely-seated partner for 2 minutes, and then we will move on to the next activity.
* Then I will put students into groups of three or four (Honors English – number off, Challenge English – assign them specific groups based on Shenanigans) and hand out one Mysterious Events Sheet to each group. Explain the sheets (each student is an elder from the modern-day portable tribe; some mysterious things have been happening lately – and it is up to them to make sense of these events by explaining them in cultural terms their tribe would understand). Each group gets to choose which mysterious events they want to turn into a folk tale, and the folk tale only has to be half a page to one page long, hand-written. I will explain that I am not looking for Shakespeare here, just something simple that helps to explain some un-explainable events. I also will iterate (though it will say it on the sheet) that they need to think about their folk tale definitions from yesterday and be sure their folk tale fits the definition they came up with yesterday. They will have the rest of the period to complete this – maybe if there is time at the end of the period they can share their folk tales (or we can share them tomorrow to get them back into Folk Tale Mode). They will turn in their Frayer model diagram and their folk tale at the end of the period.

**Assessment**

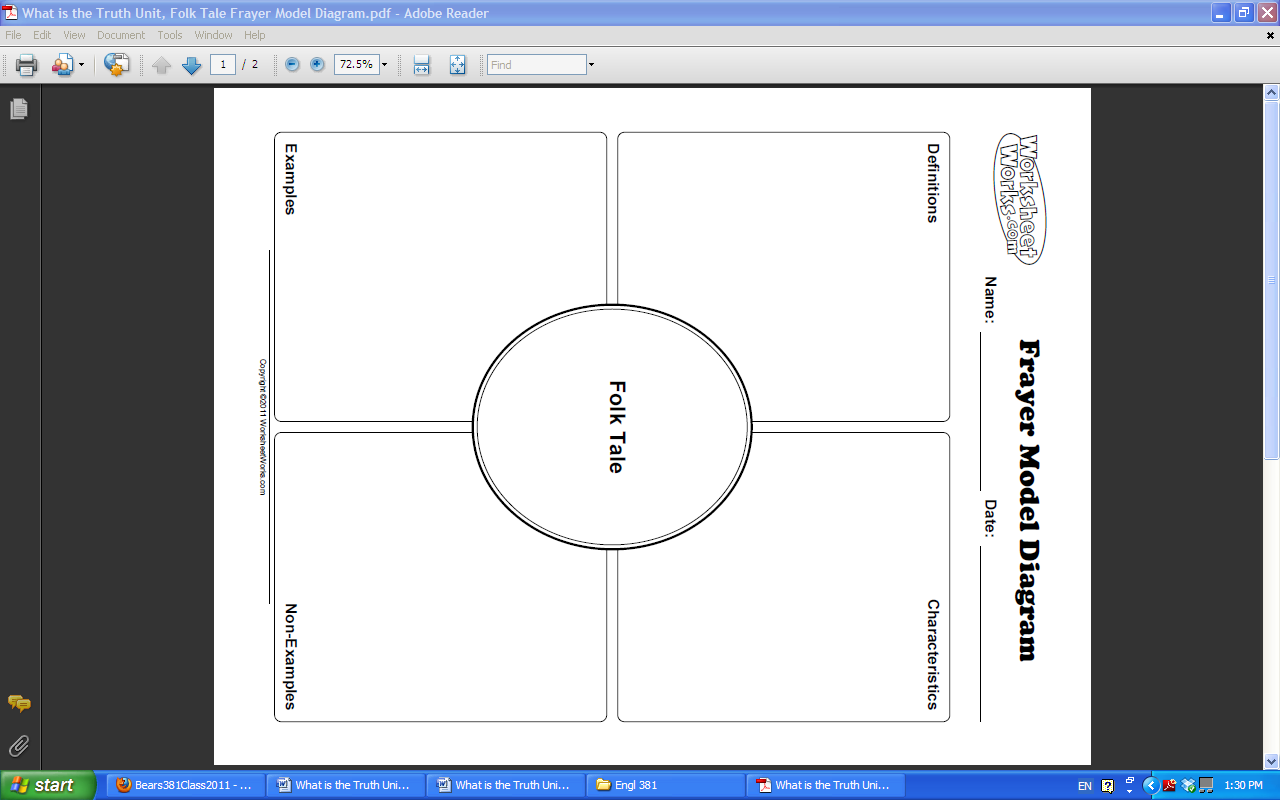
I believe that this might be a stretch for a few students – so I will try to answer as many questions as I can and rove the room making sure students are staying on task and working together.

**(Homework**)

If they don’t complete this today, they can put the finishing touches on it tonight and turn it in tomorrow. But I am expecting the kind of work that can be done in about 35 minutes of diligent class work – not masterpieces. I will reiterate this to students during their work time.

**Notes Page**

I am contemplating whether to do this in groups or individually – perhaps I can give students the option to do it alone or in groups.



Appendix D

**Create-A-Folk-Tale**

Appendix E

Names: ­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:**

You and your group members are the Elders of the modern-day Portable Tribe. Some mysterious things have been happening lately, and you are having a meeting of the Elders to try to explain some of these events or teach a moral lesson according to Portable Tribe beliefs and traditions. (You, the Elders, get to determine what these beliefs and traditions are.)

**Choose one set of mysterious events from the list and create a short folk tale about it** (about half a page to one page long, handwritten). You may write it out on this page, use a basic outline, use a bulleted list of events, or even create a stick-figure comic strip (complete with dialogue bubbles, thought bubbles, and explanatory sub-headings as needed) on this paper. If you need additional paper, staple it to this sheet to turn it in.

Use your Frayer Model Diagrams and your definitions from yesterday to help guide the creation of your folk tale.

**MYSTERIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES**

Appendix F

These mysterious things have been happening around the vicinity of the modern-day Portable Tribe (living in a town on the Lake Hazel Reservation). Choose one set of circumstances on which to base your folk tale.

1. John Stubblemuffin, who was convicted three months ago for stealing his neighbor’s pig, was found dead in his jail cell this morning. Medical evidence is pending.
2. Elsa Bookham has had a rough winter – pneumonia in November, she got laid off from her job at the bakery in December, and in January her cat, Sniffy, got feline leukemia and had to be put to sleep. But on February 3rd, two weeks after Sniffy’s birthday, she found a shivering little kitten on her doorstep. When she called around asking if anyone had lost a kitten, she couldn’t find its owner – but one woman remembered Elsa’s baking skills and offered her a job at her cookie factory. Elsa decided to keep the kitten.
3. Coyotes usually stay up in the high mountains, far away. But lately, at night, packs of coyotes have been seen roaming the foothills outside of town. They perch on Lighthouse Hill and howl at the moon at midnight, and then roam around people’s houses and yards until dawn, when they seem to disappear. But for some reason, they never go near Mr. Arthur Harker’s house.
4. Tina Almondson has a huge green thumb. She loves to garden, and has a beautiful yard full of flowers and a large vegetable garden out back. But for some reason, this year she is growing the biggest tomatoes the town has ever seen! The rest of her vegetables and flowers are healthy – but normal. But last week, one of the neighbors peeked into Tina’s yard and saw several tomatoes that were as big as basketballs!
5. The Head Elder of the village, Elvis Hammon, has been waking up several times during the night lately. He is awakened by a hissing noise like a snake or a teapot getting ready to boil, but in the morning, nothing is amiss. Sometimes though, he finds little gifts on his doorstep (a bag of coins, a plate of cookies, etc.).

**April Harrison**

**Eighth Grade English**

**Lesson Plan for Day Week 3 Day 1**

**Unit’s Essential Questions and Sub-Question(s) for Today’s Lesson if Applicable**

* What is “the truth?”
* What does a mystery look like?
* Who was Arthur Conan Doyle, when did he write, and what do his mysteries look like?

**Classroom Arrangement**

Desks in rows, facing front. The other half of the portable is full of tables and chairs – we will use the part of the room with the tables and chairs for our lesson today.

**Learning Outcomes:**

* Students will be introduced to Arthur Conan Doyle, Sherlock Holmes, the history behind “The Adventures of the Speckled Band,” Victorian Era England, and something else perhaps?
* Students will have basic, introductory knowledge of the author and the historical context of the story.

**Materials Needed**

* Books and primary source documents for each station (from the library or from class textbooks):
  + Station 1 - Arthur Conan Doyle station (some biographical information)
  + Station 2 - Sherlock Holmes station (history of the character Sherlock Holmes)
  + Station 3 - “The Speckled Band” station (information about the story itself, how Doyle conceived it, etc.
  + Station 4 - Victorian Era England station (maybe a Dorling Kindersley book with diagrams of the city, fashions of the day, etc.)
  + Station 5 - Another station (perhaps another one about Doyle or about Victorian Era England)
* Instructions for each station (e.g. Read pages 35-37, look at diagram on page 126, etc.)
* A timer, stopwatch, or other time keeping device (or I could look at the clock – but using a timer would be ideal)

**Activities and Instruction**

* No time for a bell activity, unfortunately. For their bell activity, they will need to get out a piece of paper and a pen or pencil, put their names at the top, and number 1-5 on the front of their paper, giving lots of space between each.
* Then I will explain that they will begin reading the Sherlock Holmes mystery story “The Adventures of the Speckled Band,” written by Arthur Conan Doyle. Explain that they will be visiting a series of five stations where they will learn about Doyle, Sherlock Holmes, “The Speckled Band,” and the time period when “Speckled Band” was written. Students will have 7 minutes at each station – and while they are there they need to read the specified materials at the station and then write down one interesting fact from what they read at each station on their numbered papers (which they will turn in at the end of the period). Also explain that they might not get through everything at each station – and that’s okay, as long as they are spending their whole time looking at the information and getting down the interesting facts. I will then set expectations for this activity – specifying that they can talk to each other QUIETLY, and that if they get too loud I will make them find MORE facts or they will have to do it silently.
* Then number off the students (or draw their names from the jar of name labeled popsicle sticks belonging to my mentor teacher) into groups, and send them on their way to participate in the stations.

**Assessment**

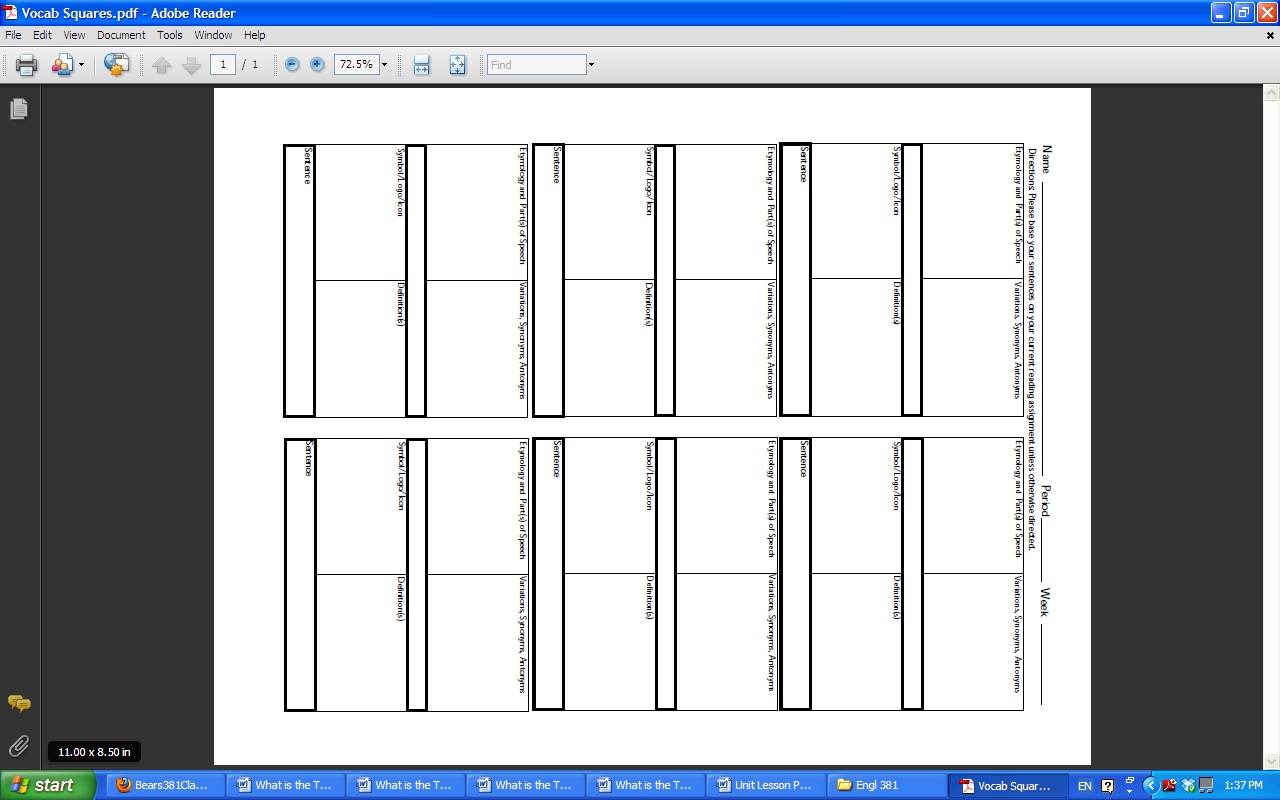
* Wander around and make sure that students stay on task and actually read what I have specified for them. Answer questions as needed.
* Collect the fact sheets at the end of the period.

**(Homework**)

* No homework today.

**Notes Page**

* Before class, write on the board in the table-room “Story: “The Adventures of the Speckled Band,” Author: Arthur Conan Doyle, Main Character: Sherlock Holmes (and his sidekick Watson).” Since the kids will be reading through a bunch of different names, I want them to have an easy visual to remind them of who and what is/are who.
* Multiple copies of books will have to be at each station, if possible. Ideally, have too much for them to read at each station – that way they stay occupied and aren’t prone to Shenanigans.
* I toyed with the idea of doing two facts per station – I just want to keep them accountable while they do these stations so they don’t feel like they can just dink around the whole time. But I figured that one fact could help keep them accountable but still let them have a little fun to just be absorbed in the materials.



Appendix G for week 3, day 2

**April Harrison**

**Eighth Grade English**

**Lesson Plan for Week 3 Day 3**

**Unit’s Essential Questions and Sub-Question(s) for Today’s Lesson if Applicable**

* What is “the truth?”

**Classroom Arrangement**

Desks in rows, facing front. Other half of the portable has moveable tables and chairs.

**Learning Outcomes:**

* Students will become acquainted with the format of the story map graphic organizer.
  + - * Students will begin reading “The Adventures of the Speckled Band” as a class and will begin thinking about the characters and setting of the story

**Materials Needed**

* “Speckled Band” story map and character log worksheet
* Prentice Hall textbooks for every student and for myself

**Activities and Instruction**

* For the first 10 minutes of class, I will give students time to work on their vocabulary squares from yesterday if they need to finish them up.
* After that, hand out the story map and character log worksheet and explain both sides of it (assuring students that we will fill them out partly together and partly on their own, and that they should hang onto this until the end of the unit but that I will spot-grade it as we go. This story map will help them identify characters in the story (since there are several) and keep track of their relationships with each other, and to help them visualize the important scene of the crime. I will then ask for questions.
* Then we will begin reading the first few pages of “The Adventures of the Speckled Band.” I will do a read-aloud and stop often as we read, asking about complicated words, asking students to make inferences “Who is the narrator here?” “What is this first paragraph saying, in general?” “How could you re-word that sentence to make it make more sense?” Just to get them thinking. I will iterate that these are the types of questions they can ask themselves in their heads as they read. Stop reading when there are about 10-15 minutes left of the class period.
* For the last 10 minutes of the class period, students can start filling in the character log portion of their worksheets.

**Assessment**

* None for this period – just answer questions about the story as they come up and spot-check their character logs and vocabulary squares from yesterday as you go.

**(Homework**)

* No Homework

**“Speckled Band” Character Log and Story Map**

Appendix H

**Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **CHARACTER NAME** | **PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION**  **(What does he/she look like?)** | **CHARACTER TRAITS**  **(How does he/she behave?)** | **INTERESTING QUOTE**  **(Said by or about the character)** |
| **Sherlock Holmes (lead detective)** |  |  |  |
| **Dr. Watson**  **(Sherlock Holmes’ friend and crime-solving partner)** |  |  |  |
| **Helen Stoner**  **(Step-daughter of Dr. Roylott and sister to Julia)** |  |  |  |
| **Julia Stoner**  **(Deceased sister of Helen and step-daughter of Dr. Roylott)** |  |  |  |
| **Dr. Grimesby Roylott**  **(Step-father to Helen and Julia)** |  |  |  |

**Story Map (Setting)**

Appendix Hb (on back of appendix H

Use the space on this page to draw a map of the scene of the crime (the setting of the crime): the three bedrooms belonging to Dr. Roylott, Helen, and (before she died) Julia, as well as the corridor (hallway) linking the three rooms. Draw it from a top-down view, and include furniture, window, and doors (labeling as needed). Use pencil, pen, markers, colored pencils – anything you want. Just make it clear and legible so that you (and Ms. Harrison) can read it.

**April Harrison**

**Eighth Grade English**

**Lesson Plan for Week 4 Day 1**

**Unit’s Essential Questions and Sub-Question(s) for Today’s Lesson if Applicable**

* What is “the truth?”
* How do we look for details in the text?
* How do we translate details from the text into a picture in our minds?

**Classroom Arrangement**

* Desks in rows, facing front. The other half of the portable has moveable tables and chairs.

**Learning Outcomes:**

* Students will have read up to the first paragraph on page 488.
* Students will comb the text for details, using these details to create a visual representation (an envisionment, if you will) of the crime scene on their story maps. First I will model this, then they will do it on their own.

**Materials Needed**

* Prentice Hall literature textbook

**Activities and Instruction**

* To get back into the text, I want students to get out their books draw a basic stick-figure picture in their journals that represents the main ideas so far in the text. They can look at the book if they would like, and can skim the pages if they need to.
* Then I will ask students to get out their character logs and story maps. We will begin reading at page 484 and read until pages 488. I will read aloud, doing some think-aloud strategies and asking questions as I read. When we get to page 485, we will go very slowly and I will stop often. This is where it describes the scene(s) of the crime. This is the portion they need to fill in for their Story Map. I will stop where it gives the basic details of the corridor and three bedrooms, and then model a description of it on the board, asking many questions like “So, what line tells me how many bedrooms there are? Can someone read it to me?” and “What are some characteristics of the room? How do you know?” I will emphasize going back to the text for clues. I will model the drawing of the walls forming the corridor and three bedrooms and draw the furniture within the main bedroom (with the students’ help). Then we will continue reading through the first paragraph of page 488.
* I will then tell the students that their job for the rest of the period is to go back and fill in the rest of their story map based on the descriptions on pages 485 and 486.
* Maybe, before they get started working independently, I will ask students to think about how we looked through those important descriptive details to try to fill in our story maps. Then I will pose the question: “How are we, as readers, seeking the truth in this story? What are we doing to try to find out what is going on here?” Then I want to ask “What is Sherlock Holmes doing as he looks at all these details?” I only want to spend a couple of minutes on those questions, but I also want to try to get students to start thinking about how Sherlock Holmes is looking for clues – but so are we, the readers. If they don’t get it and don’t bring it up, then hopefully tomorrow they will pick it up as they look for clues themselves in the text.

**Assessment**

* I will go around towards the end of the period, looking at what they have created to make sure there aren’t any huge text misinterpretations (for example, one big bedroom, bedrooms across the hall from each other and totally un-connected, etc.).

**(Homework**)

* No homework

**April Harrison**

**Eighth Grade English**

**Lesson Plan for Week 4 Day 2 (FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT AND CORRESPONDING RUBRIC)**

**Unit’s Essential Questions and Sub-Question(s) for Today’s Lesson if Applicable**

* What is “the truth?”
* How do clues help people solve mysteries?

**Classroom Arrangement**

Desks in rows, facing front. The other side of the portable has moveable tables and chairs.

**Learning Outcomes:**

* Students will briefly think backwards towards folk tales and forwards towards mysteries and speculate about how the two of them both utilize “clues” to help search for truth.
* Students will go back into the story to look for clues, and then will put those clues together to speculate about the ending of the story.

**Materials Needed**

* Class set of Prentice Hall Literature books

**Activities and Instruction**

* I want to help students connect what we are doing with mystery to the concepts we learned about folk tales, so I will start them off with answering this journal prompt: “Think about what we did in class yesterday, where we looked at specific details in “Speckled Band” to try to create a map of the crime scenes. You could say that we became “Text Detectives”… how is Sherlock Holmes’ search for information the same as or different than your search as a reader?”
* After that, I will connect today’s lesson with yesterday’s by telling them that by looking at these details in the text, it was like we were searching for clues to help it tell us what we want to know (in yesterday’s case, to get it to tell us what the crime scene and surrounding area look like). So today, students will get to look for other kinds of clues to help them try to solve the mystery in “The Adventures of the Speckled Band” before they read the last few pages.
* I will then explain the day’s assignment – in groups, the students will have to go back through what they have read so far, find at least 5 clues (and list their page numbers), and then use these clues to come up with a possible explanation for what happened to Julia Stoner and what might soon happen to Helen Stoner. Then they can use their Character Logs/Story Map, Vocabulary Squares, and any other materials they need. Designate a “recorder” for the group, and write down the names of the people in your group, the clues you have found (and their corresponding page numbers), and your speculation as to what happens. I will also say how important it is NOT TO PEEK past page 487. HONESTY is very important in this assignment, so I am trusting them to be HONORABLE and not peek.
* I will then split them into groups and let them get to work.
* As they work, I will write the assignment description on the board (so they can reference it as they need).
  + Assignment: Look through “Speckled Band” and come up with a possible explanation for the mysterious circumstances in the story. Designate a recorder, and write down at least five clues (and their page numbers). Use these clues to support your explanation. Each group will turn in one sheet of paper (write all of your names on it or you will not get credit). Put my informal rubric on the overhead projector to help them guide their work.
* They will have the rest of the period to complete this assignment.

**Assessment**

* I will look over their group papers to check that they are making connections between the clues and the possible outcomes, making sure that they are showing evidence of reasoning and trying to make sense of the clues.

**(Homework**)

* No homework.

**Notes**

* The rubric for their work today is as follows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Great work: | Unsatisfactory work: |
| * Uses and cites the page numbers of 5 clues * Shows evidence that you have kept up with the reading and paid attention in class * Has equal involvement from all group members * Makes an honest effort to come up with a plausible (though possibly humorous) explanation to fit the clues * Is written clearly and legibly | * Uses 4 or fewer clues and neglects page numbers * Shows little evidence of engagement during class * Is done by only one or two group members * Makes no effort to try to come up with an idea that synthesizes the clues – doesn’t take the activity seriously * Is written sloppily and is difficult to read and/or understand |

**What Do Mysteries Do? Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

Appendix I (for week 4 day 3)

Directions: As we read “The Adventure of the Speckled Band” in class, explore its characteristics, and learn about its components, fill in this table. You’ll work on this in class and outside of class if you need extra time. **DON’T LOSE THIS SHEET** - it will be collected for a grade with your final project at the end of the unit.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | “The Adventure of the Speckled Band” |
| Main Characters:  (Who is involved?) |  |
| Basic Events:  (Very simple plot line) |  |
| What is the form of this story? (Think back to our brainstorming session – what do  mysteries look like?) |  |
| Why do you think someone would have written this story? |  |
| How does this story answer the question, “What is the truth?” |  |

**April Harrison**

**Eighth Grade English**

**Lesson Plan for Week 5 Day 2**

**Unit’s Essential Questions and Sub-Question(s) for Today’s Lesson if Applicable**

* What is “the truth?”

**Classroom Arrangement**

* Desks in rows, facing front. The other half of the portable has moveable tables and chairs.

**Learning Outcomes:**

* Students will begin reading “The Horseman in the Sky”
* Students will independently keep track of characters (using a character log) and story events (using a story map) that they can create for themselves
* Students will see examples of organizational tools they can use to keep track of story characters and events

**Materials Needed**

* New, blank vocabulary squares sheets
* “Horseman” character log/story map

**Activities and Instruction**

* To begin the class, I will hand out new vocabulary square sheets and a “Horseman” character log and story map. I will spend several minute explaining these in detail, since they will be items they have seen before but now I am expecting them to do them more independently and I am giving them more choices. Model these choices on the board as I explain the requirements to them.
  + Vocab squares: students will now have to choose their own words
  + Character log: students must keep track of characters, have at least three of them and have specific traits for them (appearance? Traits? Role in the story), but they get to choose how they organize it. Draw graph, table, and concept map on the board for them to see, and explain how you could fill them out, but let them know they can use any method they want as long as it is helpful to them.
  + Story Map: students can use this to keep track of the events in the story, the locations, etc. Tell them they can create a diagram (like in “Speckled Band”), an outline of events (use “Speckled Band” as the example), and model the list on the board. Anything that helps them keep track of what is going on in the story.
* Then I will read the first page or two of “Horseman” out loud. Afterwards, the students will have the rest of the period to work on their vocabulary squares and their character log/story map.

**Assessment**

* See how much support students need in organizing their ideas about the story. Offer assistance as needed.

**(Homework**)

* No homework.

**“Horseman” Character Log and Story Map**

Appendix J

**Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

Here is your opportunity to keep a character log on your own terms. You must have at least 3 characters here (with details about each one like name, traits, role in the story, etc.), but you can organize them any way you want (graph, table, concept web, etc.). Create this in a way that is meaningful to **you** so that it helps **you** keep track of what is going on in the story.

**Characters:**

**Story Map/Timeline/Etc.**

Appendix Jb (on the back of Appendix J)

Here is another opportunity for you to keep track of the story but do it on your own terms. Here, you can diagram the scene of the action, create a basic outline of events or a timeline, etc. You can even do this after you read – you can go back and fill this in to help your understanding of the story. There must be something on this page for me to grade, but make it something that is meaningful to you to help yourself keep track of what is going on in this story.

**April Harrison**

**Eighth Grade English**

**Lesson Plan for Week 5 Day 3**

**Unit’s Essential Questions and Sub-Question(s) for Today’s Lesson if Applicable**

* What is “the truth?”

**Classroom Arrangement**

* Desks in rows, facing front. The other half of the portable has moveable tables and chairs.

**Learning Outcomes:**

* Students will finish “The Horseman in the Sky”
* Students will create and share (via silent discussion) their interpretations of how the story ended

**Materials Needed**

* Prentice Hall textbooks

**Activities and Instruction**

* To begin, we will briefly summarize what we have read so far in the text by doing something.
* Then, we will read the rest of the story out loud.
* I will give students 5 minutes at the end of the story to think about what they just read, to go back and skim passages if they got confused, or to twiddle their thumbs for a bit.
* Then I will instruct students on the protocol for a silent discussion. I will have each student get out a piece of paper and write this question at the top: “What happened at the end of the story?” I will give students 5 minutes to answer this question, and then 2 minutes to think of another question to ask (a question about the text, your relationship to the text, what it means, what the main character was thinking, etc.). Then they will pass their papers on, having 5 minutes to respond and then two minutes to come up with one new question. Then they will pass papers again, and have two minutes to respond to that question.
* For the last few minutes of class, students will share their answers to the 1st question, and will share a few of their favorite questions and answers.
* If we run out of time, we can share the responses tomorrow as a frontloading activity.

**Assessment**

* I will see if students are actually participating, and see the types of questions they are asking. This will help me make a note of how to handle class tomorrow – do we need to talk about basic interpretation of the story? Can we talk about the perspectives of the characters? Are they ready to do the What Does “Horseman” Do? worksheet on their own tomorrow?

**(Homework**): No homework

**What Does “Horseman” Do? Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

Appendix K for week 5 day 4

Directions: Now that you’ve read “Horseman,” it’s time for you to think about what this story does. Use this sheet to help you put down on paper what YOU think about the story and ultimately, what the story does. **DON’T LOSE THIS SHEET** - it will be collected for a grade with your final project at the end of the unit.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | “The Adventure of the Speckled Band” |
| Main Characters:  (Who is involved?) |  |
| Basic Events:  (Very simple plot line) |  |
| What is the form or what are the characteristics of the story? |  |
| Why do you think someone would have written this story? |  |
| How does this story answer the question, “What is the truth?” |  |

**April Harrison**

**Eighth Grade English**

**Lesson Plan for Week 6 Day 1**

**Unit’s Essential Questions and Sub-Question(s) for Today’s Lesson if Applicable**

* What is “the truth?”
* How are folk tales and mysteries similar and different?

**Classroom Arrangement**

* Desks in rows, facing front. The other half of the portable has moveable tables and chairs.

**Learning Outcomes:**

* Students will compare and contrast the characteristics, functions, similarities, and differences between folk tales and mysteries via a HUGE VENN DIAGRAM
* Students will use this tool to start thinking about what “Horseman” does, and how “Horseman” fits into this paradigm

**Materials Needed**

* Huge swath of butcher paper with a venn diagram drawn on it (one side labeled “Folk Tales” and the other side labeled “Mysteries.” Preferably hang this on the wall. (I suppose I could use the board, but a huge diagram is more fun.)

**Activities and Instruction**

* Have students re-enter the text with 5 minutes on this journal entry: “Now we have read folk tales and mystery. How is “Horseman” similar or different to folk tales and mysteries?”
* Then, I will have students get out their What Do Mysteries Do? and What Do Folk Tales Do? worksheets.
* Then I will explain that we will be discussing what the traits of folk tales, the traits of mysteries, and seeing where they are similar, different, or overlap by creating a class venn diagram with folk tales on one side, mysteries on the other. Make connections back to different texts, asking questions like “Which text had that characteristic? Do you remember where in “Speckled Band” that happened? How do you know the text has that function?” etc.
* Towards the end of the class, ask them to look at what they have created and, in partners, discuss where “Horseman” fits into this diagram. What does “Horseman” do? Does it fit with folk tales, or with mysteries, or is it somewhere in the middle? Remind them that they will be making a case for either side in their final project, and that there is no right or wrong answer – as long as they support it with good evidence. Give them the rest of the period to talk about this.

**Assessment**

* See what kinds of responses the students are making on the diagram. Make a mental note to see who is participating, who seems to have their sheets out, and who doesn’t.

**(Homework**)

* No homework.

**Folklore and Mysteries Final Unit Project**

**WRITERS, HERE IS YOUR QUEST:**

You are an editor at a large book company, Polar Bear Books. Polar Bear Books has two new books coming out soon – one is a mystery anthology and one is a collection of folk tales. The compiler of each of these books is in a bind – they each want to put “The Horseman in the Sky” by Ambrose Bierce into their books! The Editor-In-Chief, Angela Icecap, will not allow this story to go in both books – so **it is YOUR job to decide whether “The Horseman in the Sky” makes more sense in a mystery anthology or a book of varied folk tales**. Make your case to Mrs. Icecap, explaining why “Horseman” should be considered either a mystery or a folk tale. You can do a presentation with a poster, write a detailed business letter, or choose a different project (which must be approved by me).

You must **also include a written reflection of one half to two double-spaced pages where you answer these questions:**

1. How does my project relate to our essential question, “What is “the truth”?
2. Has your work changed the way you think about folk tales? Mysteries? People? Yourself? Why or why not?
3. What do you still have questions about?

In order to do this final project, it might help you to look back at the assignments you have done over this unit:

* What Do Folk Tales DO? worksheet
* “Speckled Band” Vocabulary Squares
* “Speckled Band” Character Log/Story Map
* What Do Mysteries DO? Worksheet
* “Horseman” Vocabulary Squares
* “Horseman” Character Log/Story Map
* Journals

*Keep in mind, Polar Bear Books Editor…*

Over the last few weeks, we have explored folk tales and mysteries. We have discovered that they are both rooted in lack of information, but also in our human desire to understand the unknown. As humans, we are always seeking the truth – but remember, “truth” for one person may not be “truth” for another…

***Use the rubric on the next page to keep your project on track.***

**Projects will be assessed in the following areas:**

*Project Point Total: 50 Points Possible*

Length, Composition, and Formatting: 5 Points Possible

* If business letter is selected, project must be 2-3 pages, double spaced, normal margins, Times New Roman (or similar) font, in proper business letter format
* If poster and presentation are selected, poster must be clear, thoughtfully constructed, and tidy. Presentation must be 3-5 minutes, and delivered with poise and clear preparation
* Other types of projects must be professional, well constructed and/or delivered, printed/drawn legibly and cleanly (not sloppy or thrown together)

General English Usage: 5 Points Possible

* Project has accurate spelling/punctuation/grammar, and good sentence clarity
* Project is well revised and edited, with good sentence flow and appropriate use of language

Demonstrates Effort and Understanding: 20 Points Possible

* Project shows that you have a clear understanding of the specific features and origins of folk tales and mysteries, as well as a clear understanding of what folk tales and mysteries DO for humans
* Project shows evidence of your thorough thinking and planning
* Project shows that you have thoroughly and carefully read “Horseman in the Sky” and understand its plot line, characters, most vocabulary, and main idea
* Project makes effective use of the medium (letter, presentation, etc.) to convey your ideas

Creativity/Perspective: 10 Points Possible

* Project shows creativity and originality
* Project shows consideration of the different perspectives regarding the classification of folk tales and mysteries

Final Reflection: 10 Points Possible

* Reflection clearly and specifically answers the questions listed above in Reflection description
* It must show genuine, personal reflection about our Essential Question
* Reflection evidences critical thinking
* Reflection is revised and edited, has clear sentences and appropriate use of language, and uses accurate spelling/punctuation/grammar

What is the Truth?” Unit Rationale

At the beginning of this semester, I never would have imagined that I could create a unit plan like this. But suddenly, at the end of this semester, I have done it! Somehow I have this mammoth unit plan, complete with worksheets, learning tools, lesson plans, etc., and the further I complete it the more I want to teach it myself. Now, I have created a 6 week unit plan based on the “mysterious circumstances” framework set forth by the district. But my focus for the unit is the primary essential question, “What is the Truth?” and subsequently, “How to humans make sense of the unknown?” Rather than try to cram in all the copious ideas the district suggests, I decided to streamline the unit down to focusing on folk tales and mysteries, and how they are two different but inter-related ways that humans seek and try to explain the unknown. I chose to frontload the essential questions, then frontload folk tales, examine folk tales, then frontload mysteries, examine mysteries, and finally combine what we have learned about both in a synthesizing project where students try to classify one story as either a folk tale or a mystery (based on their own interpretation). I am extremely proud of what I have created, but I can’t say this has been an easy process.

When I began this unit, I really just looked at the eighth grade Meridian School District curriculum and based my plans on the conceptual idea the district had already organized: “Mysterious Circumstances.” The district concept map includes tons of concepts to teach: folk tales, mysteries, logic, reasoning, natural phenomenon, personal origins, cliff-hangers, historical mysteries, etc. etc. This seemed to be far too much to cover – but it also was intriguing to me because I don’t really know a whole lot about mysteries or folk lore. I realized that the shows and books I like have an element of seeking the unknown, but I have never found much particular interest in the standard mystery fare (Sherlock Holmes, Nancy Drew, The Twilight Zone, etc.). This unit gave me the opportunity to expand my knowledge and FIND interest in a literary area that I had previously overlooked. The suggested readings were also completely foreign to me – I had only read ONE of the pieces on the list (“Tell-Tale Heart” by Edgar Allen Poe), so it was also an opportunity to read a bunch of texts that I had never seen before. I figured, if I am going to create this unit, I might as well do some learning for myself in the process.

In the process of creating this plan, I have also realized how important (and how COPIOUS) revision can be. It really hit home when you mentioned that we need to give ourselves permission to plan badly to start. It can always be changed, and always be improved upon. This is how I felt at our first unit plan deadline – I had to force myself for HOURS just to keep typing so that I would have SOMETHING to work from later. But now, I feel much more comfortable about putting something down as a preliminary idea, and then later coming back to it and re-evaluating whether it can be improved upon or should be trashed. I have several examples of this.

One example is in regards to my final project for the unit. Initially, I wanted students to take a folk tale and turn it into a mystery story, or take a mystery and turn it into a folk tale. I thought that this would assess how well students understood folk tales and mysteries, since you have to know the format and general reasons people create both types of stories in order to switch them around. But the longer I planned, the more I saw myself planning lessons where students not only learn the *form* of the mystery and the folk tale, but learning the *function* of these stories. As I kept thinking about our question, what is the Truth?, it didn’t seem to matter so much that students knew exactly the form of the mystery and all of the form’s nuances, it seemed more important that students be able to understand the function that folk tales and mysteries serve to humans. I also wanted students to have some leeway to come up with their OWN interpretation and personal answer to our essential questions – and this final project didn’t really give them room for creative interpretation or real synthesis of the question, it just was a creative writing project where I gave them stories to start from and then just asked them to rearrange the parts and plug them into a different formula. So, I changed the final project. Now, they will be required to read the story “Horseman in the Sky” (which is a mysterious tale which could be interpreted as having a touch of the supernatural, and hints at a moral) and then make the case for whether it should be classified as a folk tale or a mystery. I like that this project asks them to take one text and make a concerted choice about it, and then support it with what they have learned throughout the unit – and gives them leeway to decide what they think for themselves.

Another example of my in-progress changes is in regards to the texts I chose to use. Above, I mentioned that “Tell-Tale Heart” was the only piece from the selections that I had actually read. I like the story myself, and as such, I was determined to include it in the mystery portion of my unit. But, as I planned and eventually as I changed the end-of-unit project, I realized that “Tell-Tale Heart” is fun for me, and spooky to read, and full of great imagery. But it wouldn’t really serve any valid purpose in the unit. It is an ambiguous text – and my purpose was to provide fairly typical folk tales and mysteries as examples, and then give on ambiguous text at the end for students to process themselves. The fun spook factor wasn’t achieving anything – so I axed it. With that choice though, I felt kind-of empowered to let go of my own preferences for the sake of staying aligned with my goals.

In the beginning, I also had a few doubts in regards to the idea of using an essential question to guide a unit. I was overwhelmed by the idea of doing one question, choosing texts to fit that question, and then somehow coincidentally covering all these required content standards in the process. I was wondering how you could actually make sure you hit requirements when you aren’t being requirement focused, if that makes sense. But over the course of this planning, I have realized that this does make a lot of sense. If you have to write an essay (and have to teach students important essay writing skills), why not put it in a greater context that they will actually give a rip about? If you have to teach awful grammar, why not make it part of the inquiry process? I have been looking at the content standards and I am still mortified that my unit doesn’t tackle enough of them. I also am noticing that some of them aren’t explicitly taught (for example, “write fluently and legibly in print or cursive”), but are used to complete the project (students have journal prompts and lots of graphic organizers that they fill out, and these will increase fluency and must be legible in order for me to grade them). But, based on Wilhelm, I know that a few concepts “un-covered” by students will be remembered far longer than a bunch of concepts that are just “covered” by the teacher. And I have realized that this ends up being a very reading-skill heavy unit, where students will accomplish tons of reading strategies. There is a lot of writing – but it is lots of informal writing, and I think that this is okay for something done early in the year. Perhaps it can be modified to include more formal writing assignments, but these reading skills are very valuable too. So ultimately, even if I can’t “cover” more items, the students will hopefully retain more of what they un-covered – and thus they will remember and use more in the long run.

Another thing that I was concerned about was the Williams/McTighe/Wilhelm ideas about sequencing the unit. The texts for this unit fell easily into their formats: close to home to far from home, lots of teacher support to more independent work, etc. The folk tales are short and approachable – perfect for the beginning of the unit where we are entering these texts and I am asking students to make inferences about them. The mystery example, “The Adventure of the Speckled Band” is long and has complicated sentence structure and vocabulary – something good to delve into later with support from myself. And our final text, “Horseman in the Sky” is also a little complicated, but it isn’t as long and doesn’t need as much interpretive help – so I can leave more of the work to the students and then give them leeway to interpret it how they like and make their own decisions about where it belongs in terms of genre. On the way, I wanted to put in lots of supports. I liked seeing all of your examples of worksheets, organizational tools, and how you modeled the use of these tools. I figured that I could also provide these types of resources for students so that, by the end of the unit, their toolbox as full of things they could use to interpret this final text. I created many worksheets to help them think more deeply about these texts (e.g. “What do folk tales do?” “What do mysteries do?”) and to help them keep record of what they learn along the way. So then, at the end, when I ask them “What does “Horseman” do?” they have resources to lean back on. I also wanted to give students the opportunity to organize their thoughts by themselves – so I loosened up the restrictions for some of these final worksheets so that they could organize their ideas in any way they want to. I figure, perhaps they can take these skills to other classes and use them when they read other texts. My hope is that they can make that jump – but I’m not sure if I have accomplished that.

Something too that I have had to really process through during this unit planning is the idea of transparency. For some reason, it’s like I have had it drilled into my head that the teacher’s progress and goals are a mystery. As a student, I was used to being on this rollercoaster where I wasn’t sure where the turns would be and only the teacher would know what we would be reaching for at the end. But here, in Wilhelm and in Wiggins/McTighe, and with you, I am learning that students want to and deserve to know the purposes behind what they are doing. I am learning that it is appropriate to put a PURPOSE STATEMENT on an assignment they do, and that it is okay to introduce the entire unit (and give a brief description of the final project) at the beginning of the unit, so that students know what is coming up. How did I ever come to think that school classes were supposed to be a teacher-led mystery? I don’t know – but now it seems like such a relaxing change to be so up-front about everything all the time.

I have also noticed many changes in myself and my ideas as I have planned. Every time I went to write a lesson plan, I found myself revising the day in my unit plan and then adjusting the days around it in order to support what I had done. I find myself constantly adding things or subtracting things as I learn about a new technique or strategy that I think could work better. And, as I go, my lesson plans are getting shorter as I get more comfortable thinking through the process of teaching a lesson without having to explicitly state everything I expect myself to say and do. I think my teaching experiences at Lake Hazel have reflected this too. I have realized that every class period can’t be a stunning oration where every minute and hand motion and facial expression are notated in my plan. Instead, I am a HUMAN BEING, who surprisingly knows this material pretty well (after processing it for so long) and who doesn’t need explicit, word-by-word instructions to still deliver a lesson well. I, being a perfectionist, don’t want to feel unprepared, but I also know that I shouldn’t expect to be over-prepared all the time either. I can be prepared and be all right, even if I don’t have a 5 page detailed lesson plan, and I have happy to have realized and accepted that about myself and about the teaching profession in general.

To conclude this rambling account, I have realized that I have a long way to go. I am still overwhelmed by the thought of doing this type of planning for every unit, but it is getting better. I also feel pressured to use every tiny ounce of knowledge I have picked up – I want to try every new discussion strategy from McCann, every activity you have modeled for us in class, every questioning strategy Wilhelm talks about in his book…but I know that I will always have these books as a resource and that I won’t always have time today or tomorrow to implement something – but perhaps I can fit it in next month or next year. A high school teacher from Mountain View told me that there is no shame in finding a few good, solid strategies, using them effectively, and modifying them to fit the texts and the situation. She reminded me that it is okay to use something if it works well instead of feeling like I have to throw a thousand different strategies at my students. Of course, I want to find a good balance between effective activities that I can teach my students to do well more than once and new strategies that also work well but keep us all from getting bored. But I know too that those things will come in time. I am a baby teacher! And I have to give myself permission to do things badly a little bit before I learn how to make them better!

I suppose, with this unit and with the career I hope to start (Tom Luna notwithstanding), I am realizing that everything is constantly under revision. My plan, my life, my interactions with students, my management strategies – everything has room to get better, and it all WILL get better as I do these activities more often and get more experience under my belt. But for right now, I feel like I have grown more as a planner, a class-manager, a lesson-executer, and a person in this semester in regards to teaching than I have for the duration of all my other teaching classes combined. I almost wish I could just take this course over and over again until I get it “just right.” I feel scared that, after doing this project, I will go out into classrooms and go right back to mimicking what I have seen in the past (boring lectures, context-less lessons, etc.) instead of doing this relevant, inquiry-based business. But I guess that awareness is important, and now I am very aware of what I would like my teaching to look like, and I have tons of resources to take with me to try to get it that way. So for now, I guess I can just accept that being scared will make me better at what I hope to do.